



National Park Service

Western Arctic National Parklands

Field Safety for Researchers in Western Arctic National Parklands

PERSONAL SAFETY ALWAYS TAKE PRIORITY OVER RESEARCH

Make personal safety and the safety of other visitors, park resources and wildlife your first priority. It is important to plan ahead and be prepared for emergencies. Be flexible and adapt to changing field conditions.

AVIATION

Aviation activities involve inherent risk that should not be underestimated. If using aircraft to access a field site, it is recommended that you take the following online safety training: <https://www.iat.gov/> Begin by creating a login profile using NPS as the agency and Western Arctic National Parklands as the park unit. After login, navigate to 'take on-line training' and complete the 'B-3 combination helicopter / airplane safety training' which includes modules A-101 / A-105 / A-106 / A-108 / A-113. It is also recommended that you take A-116.

HAVE A SAFETY PLAN

Develop a safety plan and file it with a colleague, friend or the research coordinator.

As part of this, it is recommended that you arrange to call someone daily on a satellite phone. Be sure to stick to your schedule, and let your safety net know of any changes. If you are overdue, you will trigger a search, so don't inconvenience patrols or administrators because you forgot to notify the person in your safety plan.

NEVER WORK ALONE

Arrange for field assistants to help.

DO NOT FEED WILDLIFE OR ALLOW WILDLIFE TO GET YOUR FOOD. DO NOT LEAVE FOOD UNATTENDED FOR EVEN SHORT TIMES. SIGN OUT A BEAR-RESISTANT FOOD CONTAINER FOR BACKCOUNTRY CAMPING

Never disturb wildlife in while conducting research, camping or as part of a personal interest in seeing wildlife. At a minimum stay 100 yards away from caribou, moose, Dall's sheep, wolves, and active raptor nests. However, any distance at which you change wildlife behavior is too close. With bears you must maintain a distance of at least 300 yards, but a larger distance may be appropriate. Report wildlife conflicts to the National Park Service in Kotzebue or Nome as soon as possible. Additional information on bear safety is available below.

RESPECT BEARS

Western Arctic National Parklands is home to both black and brown (grizzly) bears. Black bears are more likely to be found in forested areas and grizzlies could be encountered anywhere.

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Do not approach bears regardless of how far away they are, avoid surprise encounters, and make sure bears don't obtain human food.

Store food, trash and other scent attractants in approved bear resistant containers at all times. Other effective means of food storage, such as the use of bear fences, must be approved by the Superintendent. Kitchen area should be sited approximately 100 meters from campsites. Keep tents, sleeping bags, and personal gear free of food odors.

Be sure to make noise (talk, sing) as you walk especially through areas where it is difficult to see (alder or willow thickets) or hear (streams and rivers). If you find a carcass or smelly pile of soil or gravel (cached carcass), leave the area immediately as bears may defend their food.

If you see a bear and it has not yet seen you, backtrack or take another route to by-pass the bear and suspend your research if necessary. If the bear sees you, call out in a calm assertive voice "Hey Bear", wave your arms above your head, and stand your ground. For an imminent black bear attack you would be ready to fight back; for a grizzly attack you would curl up protecting your neck with your hands and remain still (reduce the perceived threat to the bear).

Although the carrying of firearms is allowed, the carrying and use of EPA-approved pepper spray is recommended as an additional precaution. Bear spray must be quickly accessible, not in your pack, and should not be applied to people, tents, or other equipment as a repellent (it actually may be an attractant). Before using the bear spray, read the instructions that accompany the canister. Be sure to note wind direction before using pepper spray.

Report all human-bear conflicts to NPS staff in Kotzebue or Nome as soon as possible.

RESPECT RIVER CROSSINGS

Streams and rivers may rise rapidly during rain events or on warm days with snow melt waters surging downstream. Be sure to get a recent report from the National Park Service about river conditions if you plan to try to make a river crossing. Check the weather. Be prepared not to cross to be "on the safe side".

STAY SAFE FOR SUMMER WORK

Snow or freezing rain can occur at high elevations in any month of the year. Be prepared for chilly temperatures, wet weather, and avoid hypothermia. Headnets, bugshirts, or other protection against mosquitoes will help you stay sane while conducting your research.

STAY SAFE FOR WINTER WORK

Cold weather, avalanches, or thin ice may all be concerns for winter field work. Be prepared. Check with park staff for current conditions or for suggestions of extra safety measures to take.